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VIENNA ENGLISH WORKING PAPERS

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Reconstructing or Demolishing the "Sprechpraktikum" – A Reply to:
Daniel Spichtinger **From anglocentrism to TEIL: reflections on our English programme**

Julia Hüttner and Sophie Kidd

In his article in *VIEWS* 9/1 (2000: 69-71), Daniel Spichtinger proposes quite radical changes to the teaching of English at the department of English at the University of Vienna. His ultimate aim seems to be the replacement of the teaching of English as a native language with the teaching of English as an international language. He argues that taking into account the increased use of English as a lingua franca in a global context has to result in a move away from the current anglocentric model of teaching English.

Various issues Spichtinger presents are, however, less clear-cut than he would make us believe. Firstly, and arguably most importantly, Spichtinger confuses the teaching of language with the teaching of knowledge about language. While the two certainly interact, they are not the same. He exemplifies his general observations on language teaching by taking a closer look at the Sprechpraktikum, i.e. the course on pronunciation within the Department of English. His suggestion for a new Sprechpraktikum involves – instead of language tuition – the presentation and analysis of "a large number of native and non-native varieties". (Spichtinger 2000: 71) Although such a course would certainly be highly interesting, it would hardly help to improve students' productive language skills, and therefore could not adequately replace the current Sprechpraktikum.

Secondly, while the importance of English as a global language is undoubted, the question remains whether this type of global language use will be the one most prevalent in the professional lives of our graduates. After all, at our department, we do not equip business people or scientists with English skills to enable them to communicate their professional knowledge. The majority of our graduates choose a career in teaching and the mainstream attitude in educational circles is still a preference for native or near-nativeness of teachers' English. In fact, the curriculum for Austrian secondary schools states that the target for speaking English is

der möglichst freie und sichere Gebrauch der Sprache im Mündlichen. Dies bedeutet:
- die Beherrschung von Aussprache und Intonation in einer Weise, die in Annäherung an die Sprache von native speakers problemfreie Verständigung gewährleistet. (Lehrplan AHS Oberstufe: 651)

Thus, despite a focus on communicative competence, the model of native speaker English persists in the current school curricula. This might of course change in time, but while it remains so, we believe it would be irresponsible to teach our students according to different models of pronunciation.

In connection with this, it has to be said that research into the attitudes of Sprechpraktikum students towards different types of pronunciation shows that RP and General American are the preferred types of pronunciation, and that Austrian-accented English is the least favourite choice of students. As this research was conducted within this department, it would seem that introducing non-native models would find little acceptance among our student population in addition to the problems it would face within a larger professional circle. (Dalton, Kaltenböck and Smit 1997: 118-126)

A more general issue that needs to be raised is that Spichtinger seems to think that the Sprechpraktikum uses RP or General American as a norm, when in fact they are used as models or reference points. Naturally, students are not expected to become native-like in the course of one semester in their second year of studies. Indeed, they are encouraged to find their own English accent in the course of their studies – ideally by spending a longer period of time in an English-speaking country.

Moreover, many practical problems remain with teaching English as an international language: first of all, it is not yet a sufficiently described variety of English and there are no teaching materials. The introduction of English as an international language in pronunciation teaching might encourage students to maintain – without any alterations – their current accent of English, which for the majority of our students will be "Austrian English". In our opinion, this would defeat the purpose of foreign language instruction.

On a more specific note, Spichtinger also attacks the Sprechpraktikum on other grounds, namely that its aim is "unclear, unrealistic, unnecessary and psychologically damaging". (Spichtinger 2000: 71) Such accusations cannot, we believe, go unanswered: as regards the clarity of the goal, the term native-like is unambiguous and the complete phrase "as native-like as possible" indicates that native speaker English is the model, but that students are not expected to become native speakers of English during the course. Furthermore, as in all other courses, a range of abilities deserves a pass grade. Although the information about the Sprechpraktikum given in the KOVO, the

booklet of course descriptions, is more precise than that of other courses, it still only serves to give students a very general indication of what is expected of them during the course and of what they can expect from the course. More detailed information is given to students during the course itself.

As far as the realism of the pedagogic goal is concerned, there are several issues worth discussing with regard to the Sprechpraktikum. Firstly, if the goal were completely unrealistic not as many students would pass the course as currently do. Despite studentlore to the contrary, last semester out of 113 students 82 passed, corresponding to 72.6%. This rate of about 30% failed exams is confirmed in other semesters. Secondly, with regard to Spichtinger's proposed goal of being "intelligible in global communication", this appears unrealistically low for specialists of English language and literature, which after all, is what our students aim to become. This goal seems to be more adequate for school-leavers after 9 years English training, and should be realistic for Matura-level. That the Sprechpraktikum exam is not terribly easy is undoubted, but it is not unrealistic.

We cannot help but wonder how stating the goal of a course could be unnecessary; one might not agree with the goal, but surely not with stating a goal. We suspect that Spichtinger wishes to argue that the course itself is unnecessary, a position we completely reject as we consider teaching pronunciation a necessary part of language teaching.

Spichtinger's last point of criticism that the Sprechpraktikum's aims (or the Sprechpraktikum itself) are psychologically damaging would be risible if it were not so serious. To accuse a department, or rather individual teachers, of psychologically damaging their students is an accusation that cannot be ignored. Unfortunately, Spichtinger offers no indication as to what his basis of such an accusation is. As he explicitly excludes personal experience, we are left with the feeling that this is only hear-say, and was included as a criticism only in order to add effect.

To summarise, Spichtinger draws our attention to the rise of English as an international language and the effects this could have on teaching models. We agree that it is high time to raise students' awareness in this respect and also to introduce students to a wider variety of types of pronunciation. This should also encompass an ability to judge what type of pronunciation to use as an appropriate model in any specific set of teaching circumstances.

As regards the use of English as an international language as a teaching model, however, we feel that this would be appropriate only in a re-analysis of teaching models used at schools or at university departments and in other tertiary educational settings where English is *not* the major subject. Within teacher training settings and English departments, the language skills of

graduates will – at least for reasons of employability - still have to be based on native speaker models.

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A supplementary view on the etymology of welcome

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The OED (XX: 104) traces the word *welcome* back to an OE *wilcuma* and purveys the following historical explanation:

> with subsequent alteration of the first element to *wel-* WELL *adv.*, and identification of the second with the imperative or infinitive of the verb *come,* under the influence of OF. *bien venu, bien veigniez* [...] and possibly of the Scand. forms [....] ON. *velkominn* (Norw. *velkomen*; MSw *vel-, välkomin*, Sw. *väl-*, Da. *velkommen*).

Similar information is gathered in the ODEE: "rendering of (O)F. *bienvenu* [...] or ON. *velkominn* (i.e. well-come)". In other words, *welcome* represents a folk-etymological remotivation of an Old English *wilcumen* on the basis of French *bienvenu*, literally 'well-come'[1], and/or it is influenced by Old Norse. It should be mentioned, however, that it cannot be guaranteed that the first element in ON *velkominn* represents the corresponding form for 'well'; it can equally be regarded as the regularly continued Scandinavian form of *vil-* from a Germanic compound **welja-kwumōn* 'newly arrived person as to one's wish,' which must also be reconstructed for OE *wilcuma* and ModHG *willkommen* (cf. OED XX, 104 and F. Kluge/E. Seebold 1995: 891). On the basis of the ambiguous biography of E. *welcome* a closer look on it does not seem amiss.

Scandinavian influence on the English language is usually understood as determining the period from 850 to 1070 (with a considerably retarded reflection in written documents, though). The start of French influence on English is normally given as 1066 (Battle of Hastings). If the chronological records in the OED are taken into account, it will be noted that a form *welkum* in lieu of *wilkum* is attested from the middle of the 12th century onwards. Since Scandinavian origin penetrates written documents at a rather late period and since true French-English bilingualism cannot be said to have begun before the middle of the 12th century, Scandinavian influence seems at first sight more plausible than the French hypothesis. Besides, two waves of

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[1] The Old French verb *bienveignier* is attested since the 12th century (cf. Greimas 1969: 70f., and Trésor IV: 486f.); the participle *bienvenu* is first recorded in 1170. Parallel forms exist in other Romance languages, too; but these can be borrowings from French.

French loan-words need be distinguished. The first one (before 1250) included terms going back to the direct contact with the French (i.e. Anglo-Norman) nobility (e.g. *baron*, *servant*), literary terminology (e.g. *story*, *rime*), and ecclesiastical terms, while the second stage of French influx (from Paris) encompasses, aside from some more ecclesiastical terms, governmental, administrative, legal and military vocabulary as well as words of fashion, art, medicine, food, and social life (cf. Scheler 1977: 58). It is not easy to say whether *welcome*, from a purely semantic-sociolinguistic point of view, should then be classified into the first group of borrowings or into the second. But if we regard the term as part of French politeness conventions, *welcome* is more likely to be considered as part of the later social life vocabulary (cf. *madam*, *sir*)[2]. But another observation should not be overlooked.

It is naturally not the case that *wil-* is immediately and thoroughly replaced by *wel-*. Several variants can be found in Early Middle English documents – even side by side – according to the sources of the OED:

(1) *wil-*, since Old English times until around 1225 (in the north at least until the middle of the 10th century[3] [OED XX: 105])

(2) *wyl-*, from c. 1000 (first attested in the vocative) until 1568

(3) *wul-*, only attested in Laymon (i.e. 1205)

(4) *wol-*, from c. 1250 until c. 1440

(5) *wel-*, from 1150 onwards (first as an address form in *De Vita et Miraculis S. Godrici Heremitæ de Finchate* 306)

Variant (2), *wyl-*, is maybe only a scribal alternative of *wil-* in order to better distinguish between <w> <i> and <l> (the problem of minims!)–the vowel [i] would then well survive into the 16th century, not only until 1225 (cf. variant 1). According to the OED *wol-* 'may represent either the southern *wul-* from *wyl-*, *wil-*, or the *wol* which appears as a variant of WELL' (cf. OED XX: 104). Here lies the cue to a third (supplementary) explanation for *wel-*. In the OED the form *wul-* is introduced as if it were a regular southern representative of *wil-*. That this is not the case has already been shown above. It seems more probable to explain this form similarly to the development of OE *wīfmann* to ME *woman*, where the *i* was rounded and lowered by assimilation to *w*. In *wil-* the same development might easily have taken place, too. It is possible that the **idiolectal** variant *wul-* was secondarily interpreted as a **geographical** variant of *wil-*. It can then be observed that the alternation of *wil-* (non-southern) ~ *wul-* (southern) resembles the geographical variation of *ü* <u> ~ *i*

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2   Notwithstanding these considerations, early French influence, as proposed, for instance, by Bammesberger (1984: 87), cannot be excluded .

3   Cf. Lindisfarne Gospels Matt. 25:23: 'Euge, wilcymo'.

~ *e*, which had been known since the 9th century: the Middle English continuants of OE (WS) *ȳ* are *ū*/*ǖ* in the south-west and in the west, *ē* in Kent, Essex, Suffolk, partly in East Sussex, East Surrey, Middlesex, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, *ī* in the rest of the country (cf. Faiß 1989: 35)[4]. The following series of forms can serve as an example: ME *murry* (< WS *myrig*) ~ ME *mirry* (cf. ModE *mirth*) ~ ME ModE *merry*. The isoglosses of this distribution fall together in London, the basis of the future standard variety. This causes a diversified evolution of OE (WS) *ȳ* into modern standard English (*merry*/*bury* [}beri] vs. *mirth* vs. *lust* etc.). *wil-* ~ *wul-* might have shared this development, and a third variant *wel-* might have been shaped after this pattern. This view is corroborated by the fact that the regions where OE (WS) *ȳ* is reflected as *ē* include areas of high Scandinavian and French influence. The final victory of *welcome* is likely to be due to the prestige of French, including its forms of salutations (cf. also the use of *you* or phrases like *Pardon! Excuse me!* etc.).

The upcoming and the spread of *welcome* can therefore be perceived as a result of folk-etymologies in a combination of internal motives, viz. the possibility of idiolectal variation of the original *i*, which was later apparently interpreted as geographical variation (first folk-etymology), and external motives, viz. Scandinavian influence and probably a later reinforcement by the existence of French *bienvenu* (second folk-etymology).

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4   For an up-to-date map of isoglosses cf. Bammesberger (1989: 48).

Describing language variation in synchrony and diachrony: some methodological considerations

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1. Introduction

Like every scientific practice, linguistics has to make recourse to forms of definition and categorisation, even though language is not the kind of scientific 'object' that lends itself to taxonomy. Nothing in language is in black-and-white, or can be described using clearcut labels, but only to an extent: language presents an infinite range of shades, and it is impossible to pretend that this 'infinite variation' has no impact on the way in which language can be described and studied.

Nevertheless, labels such as 'a language/language X', 'a dialect/dialect X' and 'a variety/variety X' have been used, and it seems indeed necessary to use them, given the need for classification that arises for heuristic reasons or for reasons connected with the transmission of knowledge, e.g. in teaching contexts. These terms have filtered down into popular use, adding to the discriminatory potential attached to language use (think e.g. of the negative connotations acquired by the term 'dialect'), and obscuring the complexities of our 'object of study'. Moreover, in all sciences, the categories used should, from time to time, undergo revision and be reconsidered in the light of new developments. This does not happen very often in linguistics, though: despite the warnings put forth by several scholars, one still finds sweeping statements and overgeneralizations that not only do not do justice to the complexity of language phenomena, but also detract from the formative potential of linguistic disciplines.

Such metalinguistic shortcuts, and their possible dangers, are examined critically in this paper, with particular regard to English-speaking linguistics. The paper does not aim at reaching any conclusion or at suggesting any articulate alternative: it merely means to review some of the contradictions intrinsic in the use of such labels, and to remind ourselves that any contribution to a field, or any teaching practice, should not ignore the fact that unquestioned adoption of 'shortcuts' can indirectly contribute to the

maintenance of language prejudice. Far from representing real action against the perpetuation of prejudice, claims of 'linguistic democracy' are only perfunctory alibis, and what emerges from the practice of teaching and everyday behaviour is that some forms of language are 'more equal than others'. Although we linguists say we are politically 'neutral' and rigorously descriptive in our approach, this is not always the case, and terminology can reflect this bias.

In this paper I will discuss some such terms (and concepts), and review some of the ways in which they have been dealt with in the past in various sub-branches of linguistics. I will touch on the influence of the notion of 'standard' and examine the position of some scholars who have asked where the locus of a variety is, whether the individual or the linguistic item itself. I will finally ask whether the notion of 'language variety' can still be considered valid. My 'conclusions' will be rather open, since the paper takes an ideological, rather than a strictly theoretical, stance.

2. Some questions of (not just) terminology

In this section, some recent definitions of the relevant terms will be examined, in some synchronic and diachronic works. Of course, our review will be limited, since these terms emerge in virtually any publication about English linguistics, be it diachronic or synchronic[1]. Since the present paper does not aim to be a state-of-the-art treatise on these concepts (which would anyway be a good thing to have), but just a 'pebble in the pond', so to speak, I will

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[1] For some remarks on the terminology in some 'classics' of English studies see Hogg (1996).
Let us also recall here what the OED (1989 edition) has to say about such terms (italics are all added); *language* appears to be used in the present form since the late 13th century (the *u* was introduced in spelling under French influence): the first meaning given by the OED for this word is "The whole body of words and of methods of combination of words used by *a nation, people or race*", while its meaning 5a is "A community of people having the same form of speech, *a natio"*, as translated directly from French *langue*. A form of 'ethnographic bias' is apparent in these definitions.
As for *dialect*, the term seems to have been introduced at the end of the 16th century; the general meaning given is from the Greek 'speech', but the authors add "way of speaking, language of *a country or district*". The first examples are given under meaning 1, "esp. manner of speech peculiar to, or characteristic of, *a particular person or class*": this seems to point to an use similar to modern *register* or even *idiolect*. Meaning 2 explicitly refers to "one of the *subordinate* forms or varieties of a language arising from *local peculiarities*… a variety of speech *differing from the standard* or literary 'language'; a *provincial* method of speech". The hierarchical view and the pejorative connotations of *dialect* emerge clearly from these quotations.

proceed by discussing statements found in some recent works of rather wide diffusion, or that I have come across, and that have suggested to me some thoughts about these topics, without any pretension to completeness.

2.1. Language or dialect?

Several authors ask the same rhetorical question about what is meant by speaking about 'a language' or 'a dialect (of a language)', and most end up admitting that the terms, though 'artificial' and 'conventional', constitute convenient labels, and should therefore not be dropped. For instance, Crystal's *Encyclopedia of Language* (1987) seems to distinguish between the terms 'language' and 'dialect' in terms of degree of geographic precision. Crystal also warns against the difficulty of establishing "what counts as" a language and to set the boundary between one language (or dialect) and another. Crystal does not say what it takes for two forms of speech to be recognized as different languages.

The acute problem of boundary-setting in linguistics is emphasized by Leith (1983:1-2, 10):

> So great is the variation in English that it is often difficult to say whether a certain variety in one place or another should be called English or not. But the demarcation of languages is a perennial problem in linguistics because there is no sure way of determining, on purely linguistic grounds, where one language ends and another begins. In reality there are only linguistic continua: […] It is up to us, as social animals, to decide where to draw the lines; and the chances are that our choices will be governed by social and political considerations rather than linguistic ones.

This problem concerns all levels of language in a much deeper way than most texts lead to understand; although several authors insist on this aspect as well as on the pervasiveness of variation, on the existence of language continua, etc., we cannot help receiving the impression that they, too, pay homage to the standard mental picture that the idea of 'dialect/language' evokes in the layman, at least within our cultural tradition: the idea of a map of a region with neatly marked borders, subdivided into several areas (maybe of different colours, like administrative regions), which correspond to the various 'dialects' of the wider entity that is called 'language X', or to various 'languages' (the suggestive power of this fallacy is stressed by Simpson 1994)[2]. It is clear that this picture does not correspond to reality, and yet

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[2] In his commentary on an earlier version of the present paper, Nikolaus Ritt, after agreeing on the main points of criticism of notions like 'language' and 'dialect' that will be presented in what follows, says that these could nevertheless be "good starting points for guiding students... from what they are familiar with to what is new to them". This because students are usually "at least vaguely familiar with the terms, and since

Martinet (1954-5:8) noted that it is often difficult for the linguist to make decisions: "in border-line cases, the linguist tends to be just as hesitant as the layman, because actually both use the same terms, and the linguist has simply never taken the trouble to redefine them scientifically"[3]. Several decades of intervening linguistic thought and refinement in investigation techniques after this passage was written, the basic problems remain unchallenged[4].

We will come back to the problem of boundaries in Section 4 below; it appears however that the idea of 'a language' is too vast and heterogeneous a concept to be manageable for description, and that therefore some subdivisions are needed, whether operated through the already mentioned geographic criterion, or through the criterion of intelligibility, or through a consideration of the community's perceptions (see 4.3.).

The hierarchical view implied by the interpretation of the term 'dialect' as a subcategory of 'language' has unfortunately filtered even where not expected, see Haugen (1966:99): "'Language' as the superordinate term can be used without reference to dialects, but 'dialect' is meaningless unless it is implied that there are other dialects and a language to which they can be said to 'belong'" (on the autonomy-heteronymy polarity as basis for the language-dialect distinction see e.g. Romaine 1994:16). The hierarchy can be based on other criteria; the two most popular ones are relative size and relative prestige

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their technical definitions are not all that different from their everyday meanings". This latter argument is of course part of my problem: the 'everyday meaning' of *dialect* is so loaded with prejudice and bias that we must absolutely avoid 1) making it coincide with the technical definition of the term, and 2) that students should be led to reinforce their prejudices by coating them in 'science'. My aim is of course to contribute to the precise reversal of these two undesirable effects.

3 This embarrassment in assigning labels to specific forms is evident also in other cases, e.g. on Scots/Scottish English see Leith (1983:161; original italics): "… In sum, the terms *dialect* and *language* are not fine enough to apply unequivocally to Scots", and Miller (1993:99-100): "The problem of constructions whose status is indeterminate – not clearly Scottish English but not clearly standard written English either – can be handled by adopting the concept of a continuum. [...] However, as it is not our purpose here to define and delimit different varieties, we will use the terms 'Scots', 'broad Scots' and 'Scottish English' fairly freely in reference to our data".
In such cases the term 'variety' can conveniently act as a carpet under which all doubts can be swept and to avoid commitment, but some uses of the term 'variety' present the same problems, see e.g. Gramley and Pätzold (1992), who first define British English and American English as two 'varieties', then refer to Canadian English as a 'subvariety' of the latter, and finally introduce the idea of varieties internal to the national ones. See also Algeo (1992:158-162), where the 'varieties' of Scottish English, Irish English etc. are mentioned, and Preston (1986:6).

4 Malkiel (1984) notes some such limits in Petyt (1980) and, more restrictedly, in Chambers-Trudgill (1980).

(Hudson 1980:45), but another parameter is relative distance in form (possibly an effect of the influence of the family tree model and of the use of the term 'dialect' in comparative linguistics). The latter parameter is sometimes invoked in a would-be 'objective' way: Romaine (1994:6) reports classifications based on the number of cognates, but justly concludes that these 'measurements' tell us nothing about the way speech communities perceive language varieties and their relative status. Sometimes the concept is stated much more vaguely: while speaking about gradual divergence of language forms after split in a community, Baugh and Cable (1978:17) state that "the differences may be slight if the separation is slight, and we have merely local dialects. On the other hand, they may become so considerable as to render the language of one district unintelligible to the speakers of another. In this case we generally have the development of separate languages". Over-generic, misleading and possibly prejudiced statements such as these should be avoided in textbooks, since they tend to perpetuate a distorted view of language variation and change.

Thus, the use of the term 'dialect' has not been totally disengaged from the pejorative meaning it has in its popular use; several linguists use the term with caution, accompanying it with so many and so emphatical remarks about the 'equal dignity' of all speech forms that one suspects that most prejudices are still there, intact, and that the danger of their perpetuation is ever-present (e.g. Trudgill 1990:13)[5]. Another problem is the multiplicity of meanings that 'dialect' can have, and that can generate confusion. Crystal (1987:24) warns his readers against the use of 'dialect' to refer only to rural, non-standard or 'primitive' language varieties, but it must be noted that only in the final *Index* to his work (p. 419) he introduces a social aspect in the definition (an aspect now considered organic to this term, cp. O'Donnell-Todd 1991:26 and Romaine 1994:2). For an account of the more prejudiced views that Crystal criticizes see Brook (1963:17-33); see also Lehmann (1992:3, original emphasis): "Subdivisions of a language are referred to as *dialects*. The study of variations among dialects of a language is termed *dialect geography*". This is precisely the sort of unqualified, overdetermined statements that is, in my opinion, to be fought against and precluded access to future handbooks[6].

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[5] This anxiety to affirm the equal linguistic dignity of all forms can be seen for instance in Chambers-Trudgill (1980:5), Lass (1987:4), Leith (1983:92), Trudgill (1990:3), and several others.

[6] A more specific form of prejudice concerns urban varieties, considered 'corrupt' varieties of the 'genuine' rural dialects, an attitude that was reinforced by the view of Wyld (1927) that urban English can be described as the 'Modified Standard' of 'city vulgarians'. This implies that it can be characterized as an unsuccessful, or partly

In sum, authors take great pains to state clearly that different dialects are a fiction, as are different languages (O'Donnell - Todd 1991:37, Romaine 1994:2), but the same authors nevertheless say that these are useful fictions, and therefore should be maintained. For a recent example see Trudgill (1990:6):

> People often ask: how many dialects are there in England? This question is impossible to answer [...] The farther you travel, the more different the dialects will become from the one in the place you started, but the different dialect will seem to merge into one another. without any abrupt transitions. There are no really sharp dialect boundaries in England [...] We realize that dialects form a continuum, but for the sake of clarity and brevity, we divide this continuum up into areas at points where it is least continuum-like.

2.2. An infinite 'variety'

The consideration of the social *côté* of the concept of 'dialect' has brought to the spread of terms like *sociolect* and the backformation *lect*. Crystal (1987:24) and Romaine (1994:138) notice that the latter has come to be used as a 'neutral' term to refer to any language form[7]; this 'neutrality' (i.e. avoidance of risking pejorative terms but also avoidance of taking a definite stance) has been at the origin of the spread of the term *variety* itself. Crystal (1987:24) notices that "it is also useful to have a term for *any* variety of a language which can be identified in a speech community – whether this be on personal, regional, social, occupational or other grounds. The term *variety* is itself often used for this purpose." This use has been gaining ground since the 1950s; the social aspect of the term, in contrast to what happened with *dialect*, has been emphasized right from the start. Weinreich (1954) proposed to substitute *variety* for *dialect* because the latter is incompatible with a structuralist view of language. Gregory (1967) presents a classification of varieties and distinguishes between 'dialectal varieties' — to be preferred to 'dialects' precisely because these refer only to the geographical aspect — and 'diatypic varieties' (related to the conditions of language use) a term preferred to 'register'.

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successful, effort by urban dwellers to achieve competence in 'Standard' English (which for Wyld is the English of the upper and upper-middle classes (Milroy 1992a:100; 1994:48-58; on the alleged 'purity' of rural dialects cp. some 19th-century opinions gathered by Bailey 1992:282; see also Ihalainen 1990:191ff.).

7   The definition of *lect* in Crystal (1987:424) is: "A collection of linguistic phenomena that has a functional identity within a speech community, e.g. a regional or social variety". He does not grant to this category the quality of 'linguistic system' that is found e.g. in the definition of *variety*.

A certain amount of overlapping between these terms is not easily avoided: for Crystal (1987: 429-432) there seems to be little, if any, difference between *variety* and *register*, since he mentions situational and social constraints in an apparently interchangeable way. The same can be said about Leith (1983:63), where we find the following statement: "…words are often borrowed into particular varieties of a language, and become part of the technical and specialized usage of certain groups of users only": the implication here seems to be that varieties are identified with registers or with specialized language forms as they are normally intended in ESP studies. On the contrary, Hymes (1986:63) seems to assign to *register* a more restricted meaning, while for Gregory (1967; cp. also Gregory - Carrol 1978) registers form a subsystem of 'varieties'. Algeo (1992:166-7) points out that the traditional distinction 'dialect' - 'register' (i.e. variety according to user vs. according to use) is not watertight, since speakers vary their uses also depending on the circumstances and situation of use, so in some cases the two may coincide.

Another term that has been called into question is *style*. According to Turner (1973:239), any theory of varieties is already a theory of styles, which attests the close connection between variation studies and stylistics. Traugott and Romaine (1985) analyze the differences between 'styles' in socio-linguistics and in historical linguistics: they concede that it is difficult to study the inventory and the value of specific choices when the total range of alternatives is not known, but claim that the concept of style can be very use-ful in socio-historical linguistics, to try and determine the social significance of some uses. Milroy and Milroy (1991:20) seem, at some points, to identify varieties with 'styles'. This term is undergoing the same developments (reviewed in Spillner 1987) as others before it: there has been a progressive realization that style should be seen as a continuum, and that subdivisions are illusory (Romaine 1982; O'Donnell - Todd 1991:65-6).

As can be seen, there is a much higher degree of overlapping and disagreement in these definitions than may appear desirable; in some cases, definitions become extremely intricate: "Languages are sets of varieties and thus varieties are elements of languages; standard varieties and dialects (= dialectal varieties) on the other hand are various types of such elements (varieties). So a language can contain dialects and one or more standard varieties (whereby a variety is never a dialect and a standard variety simultaneously) as well as other types of varieties" (Ammon 1987:317). This does not seem to be much more than a tongue-twister, and I admit I fail to see its point, unless it is an old hierarchy-minded statement dressed in fashionable attire.

Thus, the danger of using general labels is that they end up being useless; the ubiquitous term 'variety'[8] can easily become a term for all seasons, so to speak. This may be a good thing, since it solves the heuristic problem of speaking about language forms at the macro-level without taking stance as to the delicate question of language vs. dialect (as Romaine 1994:3 explicitly states); at the same time, however, this use may take on a realistic quality for linguists themselves so much as to become a sort of alibi to avoid getting involved in deeper questions, such as: if languages, dialects and varieties are indeed abstractions, what is it that enables us to communicate? And if they do exist (since, after all, we *can* and *do* communicate), why is it that recordings show such wide-ranging variation?

It is clear that normative traditions connected with the rise of a standard language have contributed to create the distorted, prejudiced attitudes outlined above. This influence is briefly reviewed below.

3. Standard vs. non-standard and other methodological garden paths

The perception of linguistic differences often depends on specific attitudes and prejudices about varieties, in turn influenced by the process of standardization that leads to the fixing of a standard. In diachornic studies, these attitudes reflect on scientific descriptions of past varieties[9]. Pilch (1988:420-428) notices this bias, which often heavily distorts accounts of real data, and says that variability should be taken into account in a deeper way, especially since there is a greater deal of variation within the standard itself than people are usually prepared to admit, although the tendency is always towards the suppression of internal variability (Leith 1983:33-34, Milroy - Milroy 1993:3-4)[10].

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8   The over-arching quality of the term 'variety' is emphasized in various references (see Berruto 1987 for a review), along with its 'neutrality'. See also Hudson (1980:36-7), Milroy (1992a:6) and Asher (1994:5185).

9   Note that, although the process of standardization has been present, in various ways, in different epochs, the notion of 'standard language' is quite recent (the collocation appears in the OED with a first quote dated 1836).

10 Among the contributions that emphasise the non-monolithic nature of the standard see Honey (1985:241-257) on RP, Gramley - Pätzold (1992:85-6, 310), Leith (1983:14-15), Edwards - Jacobsen (1987) on the definition of standard, non-standard, regional standard; on the difficulty in assigning forms and constructions unequivocally to the standard or to non-standard varieties see Milroy and Milroy (1993:xiii-xiv); on the importance of not confusing the standard/non-standard polarity with stylistic continua such as formal/informal see Trudgill (1990:4-5).

Because of social and ideological pressures, though, 'the standard' is still mostly considered unitarian and monolithic. It can be conceded that the very process of standardization sets a cluster of forms apart from their natural continuum, if only because the pace of change and the constraints on variation differ and create fractures (Trudgill 1979:10, 13; Kroch 1978), but this is, if anything, only a further reason not to take the standard as the paradigm against which to measure language behaviour, or as the natural evolutionary product of a linear 'history of the language'.

Unfortunately, it seems difficult to set the discipline free from such attitudes. Varvaro (1972-3:48; my translation from Italian) notes that, at times, the very grouping of some varieties as 'dialects of language X' depends on our knowledge of future developments, and concludes:

> Not only teleologism is intrinsic to the history of the language as it has been practiced since the 19th century, but [...] it is constitutive of every possible history of the language, because linguistic evolution makes sense to us only when we are able to comprehend its orientation [...]. This teleologism is based on the knowledge of a unitary, or at least homogeneous usage in the modern phase, but, [...] it determines the inclusion in the history of a language of several, originally widely different, linguistic traditions and leads this history to relate the transition from this multiplicity to unity (or homogeneity)[11].

Quite recent developments, especially within studies in the history of English, give the impression that this conclusion is overly pessimistic and that contemporary research starts, as it were, from a more 'democratic' paradigm. This may be illusory: Milroy (1992a:1-2), for instance, notices that the history of the language is often written, so to speak, by the variety who won the competition to become the most prestigious and widespread and that underwent standardization. Milroy objects to this, since "the history of any language is [...] not the history of one 'variety', but it is a multi-dimensional history". He laments that there are attempts at deriving the history of English nearly *ad hoc*, to represent it as a linear process from which the modern standard variety emerged — much as some models of animal evolution are

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This acknowledgement of the variability of the standard on the part of some professionals should not lead us to ignore the deep-rooted prejudices and attitudes still prevailing in the general public and in the educational system (see Davies 1997, Cheshire - Milroy 1993:15-16, Leith 1983:33, 91). Diachronic studies might do something to eradicate part of these views, by highlighting the 'accidental' character of the rise of a specific standard variety.

11 See also Romaine (1988:351): "What is generally passed on to students of the history of a language..., in the standard handbooks and historical grammars is essentially a history of standardized written records. And... the textbook histories are presented as a list of completed changes attested for the standard written variety with little or no mention of variation, dialect differentiation etc.".

accused of hiding a view of evolution as progress towards the 'highest achievement'. Milroy (p. 132) charges historians of the English language with applying the doctrine of uniformity to stages like Early ME[12], when there was no unified standard. To project the very idea of a standard backwards, to times when it did not exist or was very different from what it is today, Milroy further argues, contributes to legitimize the standard further and to create a linguistic 'canon' from which all deviant forms are excluded, and in practice contributes to the perpetuation of prescriptivism and language prejudice (pp. 125-6). This is of course one of the cases in which the influence of synchronic over diachronic linguistics has not been beneficial; the synchronic analysis of dialectal variation much too often takes as its starting point 'deviations' from a point of reference which, though this is often left unsaid, is normally the standard.

Similarly, Milroy (1992b:171-3) notes that historical dialectology has tended to import uncritically the concept of 'variable' and to apply it extensively: research on old varieties has thus been based on a few indicators of regional differences held to be particularly salient, not differently from the few social indicators chosen by Labov and others in their synchronic studies. Of course, there is no guarantee of the reality of this salience, and this procedure can lead to overlook other features which may be equally, if not more, significant.

Another, this time intradisciplinary problem is lamented by Lehmann (1992:121): the influence of the family-tree model leads us to treat 'Old English' as a direct antecedent of 'Middle English' and the latter as direct antecedent of 'Modern English', a framework that is difficult to discard, though clearly unsustainable. The same model is also responsible for the tendency to identify varieties in a clearcut way. The unrealistic quality of linear and categorical models is further discussed in the next section.

4. The boundary quandary (what *is* a variety?)

The popularity gained by the term 'variety' should not lead us to think that the relevant theoretical problems have never been explored. This term acquired currency particularly after the advent of modern sociolinguistic studies, and especially of quantitative studies; but the same event that introduced the notion of variety, i.e. the success of quantitative studies, also demonstrated the limits of this notion, by showing that actual speech presents much higher

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[12] References to ME as a unitary entity still abound, and not necessarily only in handbooks, in spite of claims against its homogeneity, e.g. Jones (1972:2-3, 16), Bennett-Smithers 1968:xxi - xxii).

variation than previously assumed, and by making the adoption of 'variety' as a theoretically relevant term hardly viable[13], due to the impossibility to individuate exactly what discriminates a variety as a discrete entity; at the same time, there must be some constant factors in this web of variation, and they must be rather 'heavy' and quantitatively not indifferent factors, since after all people manage to communicate and tend to perceive language forms as 'varieties' (in the sense of types, or subsets) of 'something' (Berruto 1987:263ff.). The impossibility of considering anything in linguistics as a unit is emphasized by Rodby (1992:180); see also O'Donnell and Todd (1991:37, 39) and Milroy (1992a:3). Already Strang (1970:227) said that "dialects are artefacts, fictitious entities invented by speakers, in which, for limited purposes, linguists suspend disbelief"[14]. This is the same conclusion reached by Hudson (1980:54): varieties do not exist. The observation of this impossibility to break a continuum, to individuate clear boundaries, has led to two different types of solution, both in the direction of atomism, that can be termed the 'individual-based approach' and the 'item-based approach'. Both have brought about developments in lines of research, which we briefly review below.

4.1. The individual as locus

The 'individual-based approach' sees the individual speaker as the locus of language variation and change; one of the first formulations of this idea brought to the postulation of the *idiolect* (reviewed in Oksaar 1987), introduced in 1948 by Bloch and soon criticized because it seemed to ignore the socialization factors in communication, and not to capture variation within the individual's behaviour (Weinreich 1954; Gregory - Carrol 1978:23). This concept has therefore not enjoyed much popularity with recent trends in linguistics[15], at least since Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968) traced its history and critically reviewed the works in which it was introduced by authors of both Neogrammarian and structuralist persuasion. The paper showed all the weak sides of this notion, not least its alleged homogeneity.

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[13] This scarce theoretical solidity of the notion, although within a recognition of the pragmatic needs that gave rise to its use, is lamented e.g. by Sornicola (1977:47-8).

[14] It is common to find, especially in textbooks, that statements about the continuum-like nature of language use are followed by remarks on the various boundaries and areas, as if the preceding claims did not exist. See for instance Trudgill (1990:64, 72)

[15] But see Crystal (1987:24): "Dialects can... be seen as an abstraction, deriving from an analysis of a number of idiolects"; this shows the difficulty with which a concept, although discredited by modern theories, can be expunged from textbooks and reference works.

Both in this work and in other contributions, such as Labov (1969:759), there is a claim for the need for a group- or community-based grammar, to the effect that "the locus of the language is in the community or group, and that the speech of any social group will be less variable than the speech of any individual. Thus, variable rules are written for groups rather than for individuals" (Romaine 1981:102). This formulation refers to languages and dialects by applying to these notions the same idea that some linguists applied to the notion of phoneme: a language or a dialect should then be the abstract 'form' superimposed on a concrete 'substance', which must be taken into account, but which does not present itself neat and orderly enough to be defined and univocally described.

In order to solve the problem posed by the heterogeneity of language behaviour within the individual, structural dialectology proposed the 'diasystem' (Weinreich 1954): this was supposed to explain the alternation of variants belonging to two different 'dialects' within a single speaker, but its very first proponents found it difficult to assign unequivocally each form to one member of the diasystem, as the notion requires. Chambers and Trudgill (1980:40-45) notice that the diasystem as such leaves no possibility to indicate variations in the incidence of variants, and also tends to become rather too abstract if several dialects, and not just two, enter the picture. Trudgill (1974:133ff.; 1986:68; 1988:553) reports having developed the concept of a 'community diasystem' to explain some phenomena of preservation of distinction in underlying forms in speakers who do not normally operate the distinctions but can do so for special communicative purposes such as humour; he has however had to abandon the idea.

Other individual-based approaches tended to enlarge on these first attempts, and have been developed particularly within sociolinguistics. On the basis of the observation of the variability in the individual's speech, the idea of a speaker's *repertoire*, containing a number of varieties he can choose from, was developed[16] and was at the time revolutionary, since it intimately connects language use with social and situational aspects: the linguistic varieties in a repertoire are defined not by their origins or structural unity but by their differing uses or functions in the social life of a particular group (Gal 1987:286). The concept however is based, as the others, on the postulation of the existence of two (or *n*) discrete varieties.

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16 Cp. Hymes (1967:9): "No normal person and no normal community is limited in repertoire to a single variety or code, to an unchanging monotony which would preclude the possibility of indicating respect, insolence, mock seriousness, role distance etc., by switching fom one variety to another."

A later development, the idea of a 'polylectal' or even a 'pan-(dia)lectal' grammar (Bailey 1973), presents the same problems[17], but it has had a certain currency because of its apparent advantages in taking into account the speakers' 'multiple competence'. The same holds for the idea of 'coexisting systems' (Thelander 1988), which, if applied consistently, should rule out the possibility of variation or mixing of variants (Chambers 1995:13), since code-switching seems to imply an awareness not only of the different forms, but of the fact that each of them belongs to a variety, while it is known that most alternation of variants is unconscious (Varvaro 1972-3:64); moreover, as with the diasystem, if the number of variables involved is increased there are problems with defining the 'systems' they belong to (p. 58-9).

Other solutions to the inevitable discovery of the coexistence of different variants in the speech of the same people brought to the development of notions like 'accommodation' (Trudgill 1986, Giles 1994) or 'mixed dialects', 'fudged dialects', 'intermediate varieties'[18]. Another interesting notion is that of 'interdialect', introduced by Trudgill (1986:62, 65, 83; 1988:547ff.) to

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17 Harris (1984:303-304, 310ff.) notes that, according to this hypothesis, several cases of variation between standard and non-standard grammars are attributed to low-level differences, which amounts to saying that the underlying forms are the same. Harris does not endorse this hypothesis, since too many cases of variation cannot be explained in this way, and justly considers it an extension of the hypotheses put forth by Weinreich within structural dialectology. These positions clearly represent an attempt at describing formally the intuitive notion of dialects as subsets of the same language, but I agree with Harris that grammar systems cannot be considered isomorphic, particularly if the diachronic dimension is added, and that any such hypothesis is largely chimerical. The same objection is raised by Milroy (1992a:34).

18 "There is also a transition zone of some considerable size [...] where *intermediate varieties* occur. These are varieties which have [a] contrast [...], *but only to a certain extent*. The southern six-vowel system is gradually spreading northwards, and in this transition zone (depending also on phonological environment, frequency of occurrence, formality of style and so on) some speakers have transferred or are transferring *particular words* from [one] pronunciation to [another]. Dialects which are of this sort we can call *mixed dialects*. Clearly, the speakers of these dialects are not accommodating to [another] system *as such*, but changing their pronunciations of individual lexical items [...] Mixed dialects are dialects where accommodation is taking place, but where it has not gone to completion [...]. Mixed dialects are *lexically* partially accommodated. In other varieties which [...] we can call *fudged dialects*, the accommodation is incomplete by being partial *phonetically*" (Trudgill 1986:59-60, original italics). Note the approximation intrinsic in these notions: "[…] in the 'transition zones' we find varieties whose characterization as one or the other may be a matter of taste" (Lass 1992:24).

indicate new forms that arise out of dialect contact, mainly in border areas[19]. Which 'varieties' should these forms belong to? It is clear that the observation of the existence of such phenomena should make us the more wary of any strong claim about 'dialects' of English, both past and present.

A more technical development was that constituted by the introduction of 'variable rules'; the notion of variable is extremely important, since it constitutes a step away from rigid categoricity (Chambers 1995:11ff. also reviews the objections put forth to the original hypothesis by Lavandera 1978 and the debate that ensued), but the variable rules later elaborated (see reviews in Sankoff 1988, Klein 1988) have not yielded satisfactory results, because they basically leave the delimitation problem intact: all these formulations do not tell us much about the amount of internal variation allowed within a variety for it to be still considered a discrete entity, nor about just what should constitute the 'common core' on which communication within or across communities is based.

4.2. The item as locus

The 'item-based' approaches to the problem are rooted in traditional dialectology, which was well aware, right from its start, of the dangers of easy generalizations and of lending any credit of reality to purely abstract concepts such as that of 'isogloss'[20]. This notion seems to be another 'myth' of linguistic theory; Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968), and innumerable others after them, emphasize that to hope for thick bundles of isoglosses neatly subdividing a region into areas means to nourish illusions; yet, the use of isoglosses is very widespread in teaching practice, and the attempts to establish dialect boundaries objectively, also through the use of statistical methods, have not ceased after these early criticisms (see e.g. Grimes 1974, Gumperz 1978a). After the Neogrammarians' claims about the regularity of change had been criticized and apparently disproved by the discovery of more and more 'exceptions' seeming to point at the opposite hypothesis of lexical diffusion (see Labov 1994:chs. 15-18 on this controversy and for a partial re-valuation of the regularity of change), Gilliéron, a pioneer of modern

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[19] This consists in the occurrence of forms that are original of neither of the dialects in contact. Trudgill (1988:562) also claims that "if the circumstances are right" the formation of interdialect can play an important role in dialect birth, especially where there is heavy mixture, as in colonial societies and in urban centres.

[20] For a review of the uses of this concept, mainly in synchronic studies, see Chambers - Trudgill (1980:103-142) and Romaine (1994:12, 22, 135).

dialectology, pronounced the principle that "each word has its own history"[21]. Several atlases and other works in dialectology have been based on this approach, which to Hudson (1980), for instance, seems the only viable solution: as mentioned, Hudson's conclusion is that the notion of 'variety' is to be avoided altogether: the individual item should be the object of description. Each item should be described according to its social use, and eventually it might be possible to formulate descriptions of sets of items with similar social distribution and use; the characteristics of such sets would be however different from those of 'languages' and 'dialects'.

Thus, Hudson suggests that the only way to avoid heuristically the problem of pervasive variation is to bring the description down to the micro-level, i.e. to the level of the single item. Variation in language uses, one feels, came as a bit of a surprise to early sociolinguists who, as anybody else, were influenced by commonplace notions about standard language vs. dialects; in the face of this totally different reality, they had to try and invent alternative frameworks to explain the issues involved: in part, they are still trying. Notwithstanding the objections, neither of the two approaches has in fact been abandoned, even in the face of apparently unsurmountable problems.

4.3. Back to 'varieties'?

Variation appears now so huge as to potentially invalidate formalised descriptions. Quantitative studies on the phonetic realizations of given variants, for instance, have revealed clusterings of variants, suggesting that groups of speakers tend to conform to a realization or another, but they have also brought to attention the infinite variation between realizations: in some speakers, on certain occasions, the realization of a vowel can be slightly more closed, or more open, higher or lower than any of the variants selected by the researcher (i.e. the 'form' of an undissectable 'substance'). What 'variety' are these speakers using? Where are the limits of this variation, which may enable us to say speakers are using variant X or variant Y? To what degree of phonetic detail must a description go, in order to pigeon-hole all speakers, even those who show 'deviant' coefficients or peripheral positions in graphs? Once we have realized that a large part of a speaker's production of a vowel tends to cluster around, say, variant X, what do we do with the scattered occurrences of Y or more Y-like vowels? There have been attempts in the direction of explaining this in terms of the position occupied by each speaker

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[21] A principle that is considered to act only at a superficial level by Labov (1992:69-70), who claims that only *some* words have their own history, while other and deeper changes are determined by general principles.

in communities and groups (cp. the concept of 'lames' in Labov's work and the various proposals concerning the structure of 'networks' elaborated by Jim and Leslie Milroy), but this involves again going down to the micro-level, this time not that of the single item but that of the single speaker, and even that, with further specifications (who says what to whom, where, when and in which co-text), does not seem to be enough to draw any categorial boundaries between 'types of speech'. Nevertheless, the need for certainties in human beings, and especially in those who consider themselves scientists, is so strong that we do try.

One relevant factor appears to be the speakers' perception/recognition of varieties: "When clusters of language features are recognized by their speakers or by others as distinctive for separate populations, the varieties containing the clusters come to be seen as separate varieties or dialects of the language" (Greenbaum 1985:3). Beside the, by now unsurprising, circularity of this statement, there seem to be other problems: do new varieties arise, so to speak, from other varieties' ribs? The key word here is *containing*: do we postulate that varieties are *made of* 'clusters of features' (themselves dangerously reminding of 'bundle of isoglosses' on a map) that characterize them or is there something else that Greenbaum does not say and that for some reason is not selected as being distinctive of 'a population'? And then, how 'separate' must a 'separate population' be in order for its own variety to be recognized? And how homogenous must this population be for one distinctive variety to be regularly associated with it in the minds of other speakers?

The fact is that the term 'variety' is no more independent of speakers' judgements and attitudes than 'language' and 'dialect': a variety seems to be something that is *perceived by someone* as a distinct form of speech, related to some extra-linguistic variables and subject to be assessed in terms of these. This is implied in statements about varieties based on definitions of language community (see Hudson 1980), and is possibly typical of societies where a prescriptive tradition exists, connected to the use of a writing system and to a process of standardization [22].

The importance of the speakers' perception for the 'existence' of varieties on the one hand and for their continuing variation on the other is highlighted by Milroy (1992a: 82, 90, italics as in the original):

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[22] "It is probable that judgments about clarity and effectiveness in the use of language are universal to all human societies. In pre-literate societies, for example, it appears that it is not different varieties of language that are judged as 'better' or 'worse': judgments are confined to whether or not a given speaker communicates effectively and clearly" (Milroy - Milroy 1991:48).

> ... we cannot explain why, despite superordinate pressures towards uniformity, varieties of English and other languages can still remain so astonishingly divergent form one another and so variable within themselves. It must be the case that the norms of these variable states are agreed on by *internal* consensus in the communities concerned. These divergent states are often subjectively perceived as having distinctive characteristics that mark them out as discrete varieties: people can recognize regional varieties such as 'Birmingham' English, 'Yorkshire' English and so on, and they often have a fairly clear idea of how such varieties are distinguished from one another. If this is so, these varieties must incorporate within themselves sets of recurrent and distinctive norms, through which they can be characterized.

On the other hand, even definitions based on speakers' perceptions and judgements prove unreliable, since what emerges from quantitative studies and from interviews is that most variation is unconscious. Such observations may prove disruptive for sociolinguistic studies aimed at defining varieties, since if variation goes unnoticed by both participants, how then is speaker A identified as a speaker of variety X by hearer B, with all the sociolinguistic consequences that this implies (e.g. in terms of prestige vs. prejudice)? And also, since group allegiance is said to be conveyed by consistent use of underlying norms (be they overt or covert, standard or anti-standard), how is it that variation is so pervasive and in some cases independent of context?

It must be concluded that the strength of these factors is not so high, or that it acts on language production in a different way, or that to perceive oneself or to be perceived as a speaker of variety X does not involve using variants allegedly pertaining to variety X *all the time*, but that a level of variation is tolerated. This opens a whole new range of questions, such as exactly what level of variation is tolerated, what kinds of alternation of forms are acceptable without the 'variety' losing its identity, and what are not, and so on[23]. This takes us to phenomena such as code-mixing or conversational code-switching (to be contrasted with functional code-switching, employed in response to features of the context of situation; see Gumperz 1978b), where variation makes it impossible, in extreme cases, to assign an utterance (or even parts of it) to one of the codes involved. If the codes in question are quite close in form, and share several features, it can be very difficult to operate this segmentation, and if we multiply the phenomenon for an *n* number of speakers in a community (i.e. if we hypothesize that some if not

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[23] It must not be forgotten, on the other hand, that variation is also claimed to be not random but 'systematic' (Cheshire-Milroy 1993:26), although the various kinds of regularity in variation that have been found are in any case a question of relative predominance of some patterns, and are rarely unequivocally interpretable. For the concepts of 'inherent variability' and of 'structured/ordered heterogeneity'; cp. e.g. Renzi (1977:13) and of course Weinreich - Labov - Herzog (1968).

most or all speakers of a group or a community show this variation), what would we be able to say about the two (or more) 'varieties' involved?[24] And indeed, how would it be possible to draw any boundaries at all between what pertains to variety X and what to variety Y, unless by recourse to a normative tradition saying that form W is 'standard' and form Z is 'dialect'?

5. Conclusions

This brief exploration of meta-language and meta-theory has only aimed at being a reminder to ourselves, as linguists, of the difficulties connected with any description of our 'object of study'; a combination between the human need for certainties and the pressing need for simplifications in the educational sphere have, quite naturally in fact, encouraged several attempts at categorizing in a straightforward way some phenomena which do not really lend themselves to such treatment easily. In turn, perhaps again as a natural consequence, this has brought to the reification of some of the categories adopted, leading students and often, alas, us linguists, to tend to speak of these categories as if they were not only real, but also adequate to the description of language phenomena. As some critical studies are beginning to show (Williams 1992), such habits are doubly dangerous, not only because they lend credit to a much too linear and simplistic view of language, but also because they tend to become vehicles for the perpetuation of stereotypes and linguistic prejudice, i.e. the very phenomena that modern linguistics claims to oppose. We have seen that language/dialect characterizations can often reinforce the 'ideology of the standard' to the detriment of other language forms, notwithstanding the protestations of giving 'equal dignity' to all kinds of speech.

Of course, this paper does not aim at a meta-linguistic revolution; changes in such basic terminology would be extremely unlikely to catch on and to

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24 Trudgill (1986:91-92) reports that Thelander introduced, while doing research in Sweden, a distinction between *variant-switching* or micro-variation, and *variety-switching* or macro-variation. In Trudgill's words, "he then comes to grips with the complexity of the situation by employing quantitative techniques, and distinguishes between two different types of variant-switching, *integrated* and *isolated*. Switching is labelled 'integrated' if it can be shown that there is significant co-variation of particular variants of different variables".

These distinctions cannot be particularly useful, since a) how can micro- and macro-variation be distinguished, except in extreme cases? (It is precisely the 'ambiguous' cases that are more interesting heuristically!) and b) the definition of integrated vs. isolated switching would rest partly, especially for the latter type, on negative evidence.

become popular, and besides, there are no real alternatives to terms such as 'variety', simply because more than the term (except when it is culturally loaded, such as 'dialect' or 'slang') it is the use of the term that matters, its applications, the *Weltanschauung* it represents, and all that its use presupposes and entails in the mind of users and interlocutors, be they laymen, students or professionals. It is thus our own language attitudes, more than terminology, that we should be prepared to call into question and to work on.

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Cultural differences in simultaneous speech: A comparison between American, Austrian, and English speakers[1]

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1. Introduction

In our multicultural, heterogeneous society, cross-cultural communication constitutes an important part of daily life. People from different backgrounds necessarily interact and communicate with each other. Since they adhere to different conversational practices, their ways of talking may also differ. Cross-cultural communication therefore runs the risk of miscommunication and misunderstanding, frequently caused by differences in conversational style, and not, as often assumed, by bad intentions and strongly opposing opinions.

It is a well-known fact that people judge and are being judged on the basis of their ways of talking. If speakers' conversational patterns reflect different habits and expectations (e.g., in pronunciation, directness, turn-taking) from those of their conversational partners, then they are open to misjudgement and misunderstandings. A person's way of talking frequently leads to conclusions not about the person's use of language, but about his ability and intentions.[2] Thus, what is more disturbing than the occurrence of miscommunication in a speech event is the negative evaluation of the interlocutor as a person. Negative stereotyping and personality attributions are the result.

My study will examine different conversational styles and cross-cultural communication. The linguistic phenomenon analysed is simultaneous speech (that is, two or more persons talking at the same time), which, as part of turn-taking, is a feature of conversational style. Before presenting the design and

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[1] This contribution is based on my M.A. thesis (Strobelberger 2000), written under the supervision of Herbert Schendl.

[2] For reasons of simplicity, the personal pronoun *he* will be used throughout this article when referring to *speaker*, even though the use of the male form only might be considered sexist. Therefore, it is important to note that *he* is meant as standing for *s/he* in this context.

the results of my study, I would like to briefly refer to the theoretical concepts which provide the basis for the approach taken.

2. Theoretical background

The main concepts underlying my study are the concept of conversational style and the model of turn-taking, which – I am well aware – are not unproblematic. Thus, the phenomenon of simultaneous speech itself cannot be operationalized without any problems. However, these concepts constitute a viable framework for my study and have also been used by acclaimed researchers (e.g., Sacks et al. 1974, Tannen 1984).

   Simultaneous speech has been approached from different perspectives. Early mechanical, structure-based approaches, which counted lexical items and syllables, are strongly criticised nowadays, since they do not take the context of the overlap into account. In contrast to early researchers, who claimed that interruption is correlated only with concepts of power, more recent studies acknowledge that interruption is also used to express involvement and closeness in conversation. A detailed discussion of all the different approaches to simultaneous speech, however, is beyond the scope of this article (cf. Strobelberger 2000, chapter 4).

   Simultaneous speech has a place in the organisation of conversation, i.e., in ***turn-taking***. Conversation generally proceeds by a more or less orderly exchange of speaking turns, as also described by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's (1974) turn-taking model, which applied the methods of ***Conversational Analysis*** to their data. Similarly, my study is an application of a model of Conversational Analysis and of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's turn-taking model (cf. section 3). According to Sacks et al., speaker switches occur at a 'transitional relevance places' (TRPs). 'One-speaker-at-a-time' is regarded as the basic conversational rule, which helps minimise gaps and overlaps. However, simultaneous speech (i.e., 'more-than-one-speaker-at-a-time') is not a-priori excluded from conversation by Sacks et al., but is assumed to be brief, its precise places of occurrence being predictable by the model.

   When discussing ***overlap***, the issue of distinguishing it from ***interruption*** needs to be addressed. A common way of distinguishing these two phenomena derives from Sacks et al. (1974), who state that overlap is generally bound to a TRP and is resolved instantly, while interruption also occurs at non-TRPs and lasts for some time. Interruption, furthermore, displays an intention to take the floor and in the majority of cases leads to a change of turn and topic. Overlap, on the other hand, is often unintentional

and generally not accompanied by a topic or turn change. This distinction is not a clear-cut one, especially when it is applied to data, since intention cannot be observed directly. Nevertheless, it is considered an important distinction in my study.

In my paper, a ***turn*** is regarded as a single, generally uninterrupted, contribution to the development of talk. ***Back-channels***, i.e., minimal responses signalling feedback (e.g., *yeah, hmm, uh*), are not considered proper turns and are therefore excluded from my analysis. Based on Sacks et al., syntax is the main determinant for TRPs in my study, while prosody, which is important too, is not considered due to practical reasons.[3]

The management of turn-taking is one feature of ***conversational style***, that is, of "ways of signalling how any utterance is meant" (for a thorough discussion see Tannen 1984). In the analysis of her Thanksgiving dinner (1984), Tannen identified a 'high-involvement style' and a 'high-considerateness style'. While high-involvement style speakers focus on expressing involvement or rapport, others use and expect strategies that put the signalling load on the need not to impose (high-considerateness style). However, these two styles are not in opposition, but lie along a continuum.

Simultaneous speech constitutes an essential element to distinguish between these two styles. The way speakers employ or avoid overlap corresponds to their idea of sharing or not sharing the floor. High-involvement speakers frequently use simultaneous speech since it signals interest, enthusiasm, and involvement to them. In contrast, high-considerateness speakers feel that only one speaker at a time should have the floor and therefore in their speech overlapping is not frequent, brief and bound to TRPs.

3. The empirical study – Method

The main ***hypothesis*** underlying my study was that there are differences in speakers' linguistic behaviour with regard to simultaneous speech, which to a great extent are culturally-determined. This hypothesis was based on two assumptions in particular: Firstly, a person's way of speaking is greatly influenced by his culture. Secondly, features of conversational style are carried over into cross-cultural situations. A second, minor hypothesis was that a speaker's conversational style is to some extent also influenced by his interlocutors' styles and consequently is likely to change in interactions with speakers of a different style.

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[3]   Other researchers, such as Sacks et al. (1974) or Murata (1990), do not consider prosody, either.

The ***purpose*** of my study was to investigate cultural variation in conversational style, in particular in simultaneous speech. The main question addressed was whether a particular cultural group employs overlap differently to another group (cf. section 4). Moreover, investigating cross-cultural communication constituted a further aim of the study (cf. section 5).

I compared the speech of 12 students from three different cultural backgrounds (American, Austrian, and English speakers).[4] Each of the three cultural groups is represented by four speakers – two female and two male. The ***participants***' ages range from 20 to 27. All the participants attended undergraduate courses at the University of Edinburgh during the academic year 1998/99.

The data of my study consist of six casual (taped) ***conversations*** in English among these students and can be characterised as 'naturally occurring speech'. The conversations, which lasted from a minimum of sixty minutes up to a maximum of two hours, took place in student flats, where the participants met for dinner. There were no restrictions on the topic, nor on the format of talk. None of the participants knew that their speech would be analysed with regard to simultaneous speech. They were only told very generally that a linguistic phenomenon was being studied. It is important to note that I am a participant, as well as the analyst, in the present study which entails advantages as well as disadvantages for analysis.

Twenty minutes of each conversation were ***transcribed*** according to Ehlich and Rehbein's (1981) system. The subsequent quantitative and qualitative ***analysis*** paid particular attention to the following criteria: the place of occurrence and, in particular, TRPs; the length of simultaneous exchanges; the issue of 'relinquishing the floor'; the participants' reactions to simultaneous speech in general; topic change (on-topic vs. off-topic comments) and the break of continuity of talk; effectiveness in inducing a speaker change; the distinction between overlap and interruption.

My study aims at characterising each group's conversational style with regard to simultaneous speech.[5] However, no definite statements can be made due to the limitations imposed by the corpus.

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4   'English speakers' in the context of my study refers to people from England (in contrast to Great Britain) and is thus a reference to a speaker's origin rather than his language.
    I would also like to emphasise that in my statements I refer to the speakers of my study. Thus, the term 'American speakers' refers only to the four American participants in my study. The same applies to the other cultural groups I examined.

5   Cultural differences and cross-cultural communication are at the heart of my study. It is, however, beyond the scope of this essay to present other studies which compare the

4. Results: Intra-cultural conversations

Due to limitations of space, the results of the intra-cultural conversations, i.e., conversations within one cultural group, will be summarised in a few paragraphs.[6] More space will then be dedicated to the interaction of the three styles in the cross-cultural conversations.

Differences in the use of simultaneous speech are considerable between the three cultural groups in my study. The **quantitative analysis** shows a stark contrast between the Americans' infrequent use of overlap (57 overlaps) and the abundance of simultaneous speech in the Austrian data (177 overlaps), while the English speakers (85 overlaps) fall in between these two extremes. Thus, the three cultural conversational styles lie along a purely quantitative continuum with the American participants at one end ('high-considerateness style') and the Austrian speakers on the other end ('high-involvement style').

The **American speakers** (Dave, Haylene, Matt, and Nikki) in my study are high-considerateness speakers, who seem to feel that the conversational floor should not be shared and who therefore keep overlap minimal. 'One-speaker-at-a-time' is regarded as the principle underlying American conversation and consequently, simultaneous speech is not a characteristic feature of the American conversation. If overlap occurs, it is the result of turn-taking errors, in particular, misperceived TRPs. In such situations, the American speakers generally relinquish the floor immediately to their interlocutors. Interruptions do occur, but are by no means frequent, nor do they serve only 'negative functions'.

The analysis of the **English data**, in contrast, did not reveal such a uniform picture. The English speakers (Debbie, Dominik, Peter, and Rachel) fall somewhere in the middle of the high-considerateness-high-involvement-continuum. Overall, simultaneous speech does not play a particularly important role in the English conversation and basically one speaker is speaking at a time. Analysing overlap by relying on the criterion of TRP proves unsuccessful since the English speakers seem to interpret overlaps according to their (supposed) functions. Cooperative overlap, which can

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use of linguistic features across cultures (cf. Strobelberger 2000, chapter 5). Although there have been studies on American and English turn-taking (e.g., Wieland 1990) and interruption behaviour (e.g., Murata 1994), no studies with regard to Austrian discourse style have been carried out so far.

6   In my study, there are three intra-cultural and three cross-cultural conversations. In each intra-cultural conversation, the four participants belong to the same cultural group, while, as will be discussed in section 5, in the cross-cultural conversations, speakers from different cultural backgrounds interact with each other.

provide feedback, show interest in the conversation, or simply support the other speaker, is attributed a positive value. The English speakers engage in fairly long cooperative overlaps without a speaker relinquishing the floor. In contrast, if an overlap is perceived as negative and interrupting, the speakers tend to yield the floor in order to conform to the 'one-speaker-at-a-time'-rule, or they express irritation with the situation of simultaneous speech.

The **Austrian conversation** differs considerably from the other two intra-cultural conversations in my study. Simultaneous speech constitutes a defining feature of the Austrians' high-involvement style. Cooperative overlapping is the predominant type of simultaneous speech, but interruptions also feature frequently. Overlap signals involvement with the participants and thereby establishes and deepens rapport. Since the Austrian speakers (Katrin, Michael, Tamara, Thomas) use and interpret interruptions positively, namely, as expressions of involvement, sharing the floor is highly valued and the speakers generally do not relinquish the floor in cases of simultaneous speech. Although English is the Austrians' second language, the overall impact of this on their conversational style seems to be minimal.

5. Cross-cultural communication

Three of the six conversations of my study represent cross-cultural situations, since speakers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds converse with each other. In the cross-cultural conversations, the three 'cultural styles' (cf. section 4) come into contact. These three cross-cultural conversations were analysed with regard to three aspects in particular:

- In cross-cultural communication there is a danger of cross-cultural miscommunication, as various authors (e.g., Tannen 1986) have pointed out. The danger of misinterpretation and miscommunication is greatest among speakers who actually speak different native tongues, and / or come from different cultural backgrounds. Cultural difference necessarily implies different assumptions about natural and appropriate conversational styles, and thus, the speakers are likely to lack a common basis for conversational interactions. Miscommunication can occur on a linguistic, as well as a social and cultural level. Differences in conversational style (e.g., length of pauses, pace, overlap) can also result in problems with the conversational process, miscommunication, and, worst of all, communication breakdown. Therefore, the conversations were, firstly, examined for problems in communication and a possible correlation between such problems and style differences.

- A second aspect worth investigating was the question whether and how a particular style would disadvantage its speakers. Various authors have pointed out that in situations of style contact, one style might turn out to be a disadvantage to its speakers. Wieland (1990), for instance, found that in interactions with French speakers, the American participants in her study felt at a disadvantage since the French speakers overlapped more and could thus dominate the conversation.

- Thirdly, I analysed the conversations for accommodation among interlocutors. According to accommodation theory (Giles 1973, Giles and Smith 1979), conversational partners may accommodate to one another by displaying a convergent speech style which encourages further interaction by reducing perceived differences between the speakers. White (1989), who found accommodation in back-channeling behaviour in Japanese-American interaction, argues that asymmetrical accommodation is to be expected in conversations among native and non-native speakers. Since native speakers clearly have the linguistic ability to accommodate, and, furthermore, are more attuned to the requirements of a harmonious conversation in the language concerned, native speakers are in a superior position to accommodate. However, Murata (1990) and Wieland (1994), in their studies of interruption and turn-taking, respectively, found accommodation on the non-native speakers' sides.

The main results with regard to these three aspects will be summarised below.

5.1. The cross-cultural conversations

The three cross-cultural conversations differ from each other with regard to the constellation of participants. On the one hand, the linguistic behaviour of the two cultural groups 'meeting' in the American-English interaction is similar to each other. On the other hand, the other two cross-cultural conversations, in both of which the Austrian speakers feature as one cultural group, are characterised by variation in conversational behaviour. Thus, in the Austrian-American and the Austrian-English conversations, the conversational partners differ not only in their mother tongue but also in conversational style, while the participants in the American-English interaction adhere to similar conversational styles and speak the same native language.

5.2. Miscommunication

In all three conversations, communication proceeds smoothly, despite differences in conversational style. However, minor misunderstandings, mainly related to vocabulary and problems concerning the topics of the conversations, occur, especially when the Austrian speakers participate. These are usually sorted out immediately, most often by asking questions. Consequently, the high frequency of clarification and confirmation requests in the data seems to originate in the participants' desire to prevent, or sort out, possible misunderstandings.

Example (1):[7] lines 140-142 (American-Austrian interaction)

Dave: =Jewish   So   I guess /we're/ having a problem
Haylene: Ya   I don't know   Ya hh
Katrin:
Thomas: Hm Hhh   Ya you=

Dave: Ha-   Hannukah Harry   Did you ever see=
Haylene: No we just- Hannukah   Ya
Katrin:
Thomas: =have no Christkindl   But have you=

Dave: =that It was a Saturday night / ? / a long time ago Hannukah Harry
Haylene: No / ? ? ? / Billy=
Katrin:
Thomas: =Christmas

In example (1), Thomas's *you have no Christkindl* and *But have you Christmas* serve as clarification requests to sort out problems due to cultural / religious differences.[8] Thomas obviously does not know much about Jewish customs for Christmas, and therefore he asks for clarification in order to create a common basis of assumptions and to avoid misunderstandings.

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[7] Note the following transcription conventions:
  /words/ Words within slashes indicate uncertain transcription.
  / ? /   Question marks within slashes indicate that transcription was impossible. If more speakers are speaking at a time, the length of the impossible transcription is related to the other speaker's utterance. If only one speaker is speaking, one question mark roughly corresponds to one syllable.
  -      A dash stands for an abrupt cutoff.

[8] Even though the grammatical forms of these utterances are not 'proper question forms', these utterances seem to be meant as questions, as prosody indicates. The lack of a 'proper question form' arises from Thomas not being an extremely competent speaker of English.

Advantage of one style

In the **American-English** interaction, where the speakers' styles are very similar, none of the two cultural groups seem to be at an advantage. In contrast, in the **American-Austrian** conversation, the Austrian speakers' high-involvement style does not find its full expression, and the American participants manage to monopolise the floor for extremely long periods. However, it is not the Austrian participants' style per se, nor their lower proficiency in English, but rather lacking knowledge of the topics discussed that seems to be the factor disadvantaging the Austrian speakers. Evidence for this assumption is provided by certain parts of the conversation, in which the Austrian speakers participate surprisingly actively. At these points, the Austrian speakers' high-involvement style finds its full expression, as in lines 75-88, where the Austrian equivalent of Santa Claus – the Christkind – is being discussed. Example (2a), illustrating the characteristic Austrian high-involvement style, constitutes a strong contrast to example (2b), where the Austrians' style seems to be repressed by the lack of knowledge of the topic.

Example (2):[9] lines 79-82 and 215-217 (American-Austrian interaction)

a) lines 79-82

Dave:
Haylene: [laughs loudly]   [laughs loudly]
Katrin: So what is it in your   imagination=
Thomas: =it's definitely not a female   I don't know

Dave: So it- does does Christ-=
Haylene:
Katrin: =then   a child okay
Thomas: a child hhh   with wings and   and only=

Dave: =Christkingl
Haylene: Hhh
Katrin: Ya Christkind
Thomas: =mother can see it That's the problem about the Christkindl only mother can see=

Dave: does does   it does it leave presents /or not/
Haylene:
Katrin: Ya it okay / ? /   Ya she leaves presents=
Thomas: =it   was it in your / ? /   Ya it leave presents

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9   Note also the following transcription conventions:
      [brackets]   Brackets are used for comments on quality of speech and context.
      underline   Words with emphatic stress are underlined.

b) lines 215-217

Dave: Ya
Haylene: =so excited Did you get a / ? ? / Did you ever / ? ? / when you / ? ? /
Katrin:
Thomas:

Dave:
Haylene: My brother got me like those /toy/ games for my computer It's got like Pack=
Katrin:
Thomas:

Dave: Are you serious   Dig Dug You have Dig Dug
Haylene: =Man and Pole Position and Dig Dug and / ? ? /   Ya
Katrin: You know=
Thomas: What is Dig=

Similarly, in the **Austrian-English** conversation, Michael's high-involvement style does not come to its full expression, while Tamara does not seem to experience problems in this respect. Michael's low frequency of overlap seems to stem from a lack of involvement due to a limited interest in the topics discussed.

In conclusion, the results of the Austrian-American and Austrian-English interactions would seem to suggest that in interaction with more considerate speakers, a high-involvement style is a disadvantage to its speakers.

Accommodation

All the three conversations demonstrate that speakers tend to carry their culturally-determined styles over into cross-cultural situations. However, the styles are also adapted in some respects.

Hardly any style changes can be observed in the **American-English** interaction, probably because the speakers' styles are fairly similar. The American high-considerateness style seems to basically remain the same as in the American intra-cultural conversation. Interestingly, some types of 'positive interruptions' are more noticeable in the American-English than in the (all-)American conversation. Firstly, simultaneous speech often approximates back-channels in expressing listener feedback (cf. Nikki's *craziness* in line 213). Secondly, asides, such as Nikki's defensive /*So are you*/ in lines 32-33, are more frequent in the American-English than in the (all-)American conversation.

Example (3): lines 213 and 32-33 (American-English interaction)

a) line 213

Matt: Ya
Nikki: =could go skiing in Hawaii   Craziness
Peter: My friend has just some back from Hawaii

b) lines 32-33

Matt:
Nikki: Hhh   /So are=
Peter: =six and a half hours You just change channels for four and a half hours Probably a
        lot=

Matt: Truth for that ya   Ya it be like all we have it the / ? ? ? ? /=
Nikki: =you/   Nn
Peter: =better on the mind

<u>Peter's less considerate style</u> is slightly more adapted than the Americans'
style. Peter relinquishes the floor only once, while he does so frequently in the
English intra-cultural conversation. Thus, Peter's characteristic behaviour in
cases of simultaneous speech is simply to continue, as in example (4). Since
the Americans are more considerate, and thus more likely to relinquish the
floor before Peter does, Peter is put at an advantage.

Example (4): line 24 (American-English interaction)

Matt: =to go from five / ? ? / to fifty
Nikki:
Peter: Well it is because with fifty channels Okay maybe there's not really=

Moreover, Peter's conversational style seems to have undergone some
changes with regard to silent interruption.[10] Cases such as example (5) occur
quite often – thus Peter's frequency of silent interruptions has increased,
probably due to influence of his interlocutors' style. Silent interruptions are
more likely in conversations in which high-considerateness speakers
participate, since such speakers are highly likely to relinquish the floor in
order to preserve the form of 'one-speaker-at-a-time'.

Example (5): line 101 (American-English interaction)

Matt: =the same way like Ha-   See I've never been=
Nikki:
Peter: I saw a lot of States We went by train so I saw

---

[10] 'Silent interruptions', first mentioned by Ferguson (1977), are interruptions which do
    not involve simultaneous speech.

In contrast, in both the **Austrian-American** and **Austrian-English** interactions, all the speakers' conversational styles are altered to a greater degree.

Accommodation is most notable in the conversation between the **Austrian** and **American** speakers, where the non-native, less considerate Austrian speakers accommodate to a much greater extent (i.e., in more respects) than their American interlocutors. The American speakers basically accommodate by increasing their frequency of overlapping, in particular with regard to simultaneous speech at non-TRPs. Thus, in addition to characteristic cases of simultaneous speech due to misperceived TRPs, such as example (6a), the American speakers overlap at non-TRPs, as in example (6b), to a much greater extent. Simultaneous speech at non-TRPs, however, mainly fulfils cooperative functions, such as comforting another speaker, back-channeling, sorting out misunderstandings or matching experience.

Example (6)*: lines 90-91 and 30-31 (Austrian-American interaction)

a) lines 90-91

```
Dave:    a k k h ahh                                  I think  I=
Haylene: =ah that's  That's what Florentine that's what Florentine said she said
Katrin:
Thomas:        hhh                    ahh

Dave:   =think Florentine is jerking your chain
Haylene:                             Hhh no she said you leave your=
Katrin:                             Hhh
Thomas:                             Yah
```

b) lines 30-31

```
Dave:
Haylene:                 Why
Katrin:                 Why
Thomas: =I really don't wanna go    Oh I don't like to go to parents=

Dave:                 Why                 I think you should go
Haylene:        But /that'll/ be fine                         I=
Katrin:
Thomas: =of friends of mine    Oh I don't know
```

A new feature of Dave's style are overlaps aiming at winding Thomas up, such as example (7). In lines 72-73, Dave interrupts Thomas, who just does not want to go to a friend's place for Christmas, twice with the aim of winding him up.

Example (7)*: lines 72-73 (Austrian-American interaction)*

Dave: You found out there's no Santa Claus didn't=
Haylene:
Katrin:
Thomas: =families I never did that / ? ? /

Dave: =you   I- I understand it's a /crushing/ and it hurts me=
Haylene: Hh   Hhhhh
Katrin:
Thomas: Ya hh you know I'm / ? ? ? ? ? ? /   Ya

The <u>Austrian speakers</u>, on the other hand, relinquish the floor far more often in this conversation than in the Austrian intra-cultural one. In example (8), for instance, Katrin relinquishes the floor, even though she has not yet asked her intended question.

Example (8)*: line 87 (Austrian-American interaction)*

Dave: carrots
Haylene: =your shoe out with carrots   ya for the reindeer so that the the=
Katrin: do you get
Thomas:

Furthermore, the Austrian speakers seem careful not to interrupt the Americans' long turns. Interestingly, Thomas also engages in long turns, which the American high-considerateness style makes possible (cf. example 9).

Example (9)*: lines 33-36 (Austrian-American interaction)*

Dave: For- for Christmas or
Haylene:
Katrin:
Thomas: =I told him I'd come I will come   No not=

Dave:
Haylene:
Katrin:
Thomas: =for Christmas I told him not for Christmas I definitely /not/ come=

Dave:
Haylene:
Katrin:
Thomas: =for Christmas because I don't know I want to go don't want to go=

Dave:
Haylene:
Katrin: Mm
Thomas: =to families on Christmas it's a little bit you know invade them=

Interacting with a high-considerateness style also seems the reason for the increased frequency of silent interruptions in the Austrians' speech.

Therefore, as discussed and illustrated by the above examples, the two styles (i.e., the Austrian and the American style) have become more similar. Displaying convergent speech styles might be intended as encouragement for further interaction by reducing perceived differences between the speakers.

In the **Austrian-English** interaction, on the other hand, the English speakers' style undergoes more changes than their non-native interlocutors' less considerate style. Accommodation in the Austrian participants' discourse refers to a more frequent occurrence of long turns (especially Tamara) and a special patterning of clarification and confirmation requests. In example (10), Tamara twice asks for clarification with regard to the year Michael had mentioned.

Example (10)*: lines 74-75 (Austrian-English interaction)

Debbie: =Ages   ohhh
Dominik:
Michael: =Ages ya   Therefore we are now in the year seventeen four
Tamara: Seventy=

Debbie: Ohh it's not the Middle Ages at all So it's the Dark Ages=
Dominik:
Michael: Four   Seventeen four
Tamara: =what   Seventy four

The English speakers, on the other hand, use more interruptions aiming at wresting the floor than in the English intra-cultural conversation. Frequently there is a competing element to simultaneous speech: the aim of overlapping is not just to supply information, but to supply more information than the other speaker, as in example (11). Debbie's overlap *It's like cheese inside* competes with Tamara's turn. Tamara is already supplying the required information, but Debbie, nevertheless, interrupts in order to provide the same information.

Example (11)*: line 153 (Austrian-English interaction)

Debbie: It's like cheese inside it It's really rich   I can=
Dominik:
Michael: ya
Tamara: =filled with cheese   It looks / ? /

Interestingly, the English speakers also frequently abandon their original idea in order to reply to an overlapping Austrian comment.

While Debbie's style displays accommodation already in the first transcribed segment, Dominik still behaves very considerately in this

segment, and only becomes more involved and accommodates toward the end of the conversation. Example (12a), which illustrates Dominik's considerateness towards the beginning of the conversation, strongly contrasts with example (12b), where Dominik's conversational style has already undergone changes. In line 87, Dominik readily relinquishes the floor, while he is more persistent in line 159.

Example (12)*:* lines 87 and 159 (Austrian-English interaction)

a) line 87

Debbie: Mm
Dominik: Ya   But even if
Michael: =/ ? ? ? /
Tamara: =see it doesn't count because nobody was aware of it so   It's a=

b) line 159

Debbie: What is=
Dominik: Ah Haggis ah Haggis is all right you just don't think about what's in it
Michael:
Tamara: =can try pretty much anything now   Well do that=

Summing up, no uniform pattern with regard to accommodation emerges. However, with the exception of the Austrian-English conversation, it is the less considerate speakers who accommodate to a greater extent. The factor native vs. non-native language does not seem to be of decisive influence. Finally, it can be concluded that accommodation is more likely (and more noticeable) the more the two styles in contact differ.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, my study has shown that there are differences in simultaneous speech and conversational style between speakers from different cultures. These differences seem to be largely determined by the speakers' cultural backgrounds. Thus, my data confirm the main hypothesis underlying my study. Furthermore, the analysis of the cross-cultural conversations has shown that the participants accommodate their styles to, and are therefore influenced by, their interlocutors' styles.

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